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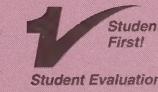
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Students First

A Guide for Students

Preparing to Write
the English 30
Diploma Examination



Preparing to Write the English 30 Diploma Exam

Dear Student:

The authors of this guide are staff from the Student Evaluation Branch. These are the people who actually put together the exam you will be writing. They also organize the marking sessions and train the teachers who mark the exams. These people see first-hand what thousands of students are doing right (and wrong) when they write an exam.

This guide and all other diploma exam-related materials produced by Student Evaluation Branch staff are identified with the logos



I hope you will find this guide helpful. Good luck on exam day!

*Frank Horvath, Director
Student Evaluation Branch*

Getting ready

✓Be there

The most rewarding, satisfying, and effective way to prepare yourself for your English 30 diploma exam is to launch yourself into the agenda of your classroom work with an attitude of participation, inquiry, and engagement.

Your class work is worth 50% of your final mark, and it directly prepares you for the diploma exam. Prepare yourself with the best advantage by *being there*.

Attend classes, work through the assignment material, participate in discussions, and attend field trips and dramatic productions. Read literature that challenges you and stimulates your thinking. Practise translating your thoughts and observations into written and spoken words. You will gain confidence and skill in focusing and communicating your ideas and feelings and in understanding the many contexts of human experience and endeavour. This will serve you well in every subject and for the rest of your life!

✓Understand the parts of the exam

The English 30 exam has two parts, each worth 50% of your total diploma exam mark. These parts are written on different days.

- **PART A: WRITTEN RESPONSE** has one reading selection (*either* a poem *or* a short prose excerpt) and two essay writing assignments: ***Reader's Response to Literature Assignment*** and ***Major Literature Composition Assignment***. The assignments are linked by a common theme. *The Reader's Response to Literature Assignment* is worth 30% of your Part A mark, and the *Major Literature Composition Assignment* is worth 70%. You have three hours to complete Part A.
- **PART B: READING** has reading selections in five genres (fiction, non-fiction, poetry, Shakespearean drama, modern drama) and 70 accompanying multiple-choice questions. You have two and one-half hours to complete Part B.

✓What is required of you in Part A

In the *Reader's Response to Literature Assignment* of Part A, you will read the poem or prose excerpt that is provided in the exam booklet and then respond to it by writing a short essay. In your essay, you will say what the selection has conveyed *to you* regarding a specific, assigned topic. For example, in June 1995, the topic was “the nature or effect of threatening forces.” You will be expected to support and develop your response by referring to details from the provided poem or prose excerpt.

In summary, two elements of this assignment are provided by the exam: a literary selection for you to read and a topic for you to write about. You provide two additional elements: your own idea of what the selection communicates to you regarding the topic (“your response”), and the supporting details from the selection that you use to develop your response.

There is no prescriptive “answer” or approach to this assignment. The mark you receive will be based on the quality of your unifying ideas and how effectively you express those ideas in relationship to the assignment. This is *your* response—to approach and shape as you choose within the limits of the assignment.

In the *Major Literature Composition Assignment* of PART A, you will demonstrate your understanding of a major work of literature that you have studied during the year. You choose which novel, play, or other literary work you will write about. The only limitation on your choice is that it must relate strongly and directly to some aspect of the essay topic you are given on the exam. (In June 1995, the topic for the *Major Literature Composition Assignment* was “the individual’s response to threatening forces.”)

You will be asked what idea an author develops regarding the topic. In your essay, you will establish the idea that you decide to focus on, and you will discuss and develop this idea by referring to details from the selection that you have chosen to write about.

Your essay will be marked on the basis of your understanding of the literature, the quality of your thinking, and your ability to express yourself effectively in writing.

✓Who will mark your exam

Your exam will be marked by English 30 teachers who are currently teaching English 30. They understand the level of work expected of English 30 students.

Remember that the teacher-markers know the texts that you have studied. They will expect you to write thoughtfully about the literature you choose, but they do not need to be told the plot of the selection you choose.

✓What is required of you in Part B

In the PART B: READING portion of the exam, you will read selections of fiction, non-fiction, poetry, Shakespearean drama, and modern drama in a Readings Booklet. There might be one or two selections of fiction, of non-fiction, and of poetry on the exam. There will be only one selection of Shakespearean drama and one selection of modern drama. These selections are not taken from the reading list in your course of studies, so it is unlikely that you will have read them before.

In a separate Questions Booklet, you will read and answer multiple-choice questions about each reading selection.

This part of the exam requires you to draw on the understanding, knowledge, and skills that you have developed through your experience as a reader. The questions explore the content (ideas), the techniques, the mood or tone, the structure, and the vocabulary used in each selection and the ways in which these features reflect the author's purpose or achieve a particular effect.

What You Can Do to Prepare for Your English 30 Exam

(Preparing for both Part A and Part B of the exam)

Language is a discipline. It may be hard work, but your rewards of satisfaction, freedom, and confidence are in direct proportion to the effort you put into developing a repertoire of language knowledge and skills.

✓Begin now

Begin at the beginning of the course, and apply yourself throughout the term to the possibilities that the course offers for you to practise effective reading, writing, and speaking.

Practise relating to and understanding literature and expressing yourself effectively in writing. Talk about your ideas, in class and with your family and friends. Discussion is often an excellent way of stimulating and exploring your ideas before you begin writing.

✓Establish a broad base

Read literature that is recognized for its excellence and selections that challenge you. By carefully reading and studying the major novels, plays, short stories, and poems that are in your English 30 course, you will establish a broad, solid background in literature.

To earn credits in English 30, you must have substantial experience with and understanding of literature. In the *Literature Composition Assignment* (Part A), you are expected to demonstrate the depth of your appreciation of literary works. You have a distinct advantage if you have a wide range of selections from which to choose, and extensive experience in discussing literature. All of Part B requires you to apply your skills in interpreting literature.

Reading widely will develop your reading comprehension skills and your facility with language. In your spare time, read articles and essays and poems that are not on your course of studies. Wide reading experience will make you more comfortable with thinking about and responding to a selection that you are seeing for the first time, as you will be asked to do in both parts of the exam.

✓Pay attention to detail

When you read, *pay attention to the details* the author uses to establish and develop an idea or feeling as to how those details affect you. Take ownership of the ideas and details that the literature is structured around so that you can refer to them with confidence.

By spending time with a piece of literature, you will learn to understand its “stance” and “personality,” and why you respond to it as you do. Develop your understanding of how character, motive, plot, setting, ideas, language, mood, and technique function in literature. These understandings are essential to your success on both parts of the exam.

✓Consider the relationship between purpose and tone

Consider the author’s purpose when you read; a clear idea of that purpose will help you understand the details in the writing. Ask yourself what mood or tone the details in a piece of writing convey. Does the overall effect of these details create a tone that is humorous? whimsical? ironic? morbid? celebratory? critical? Think about these things. Ask questions.

✓Read poetry

Develop your skills in reading poetry by learning to read poetry as if it were being spoken. Practise reading poems out loud. This will help you recognize how the thoughts, images, and line sequences fit together. Explore the significance of emphasis—in tone, image, line, and word. Experiment with the *sound* of poetry; it is a partner to meaning. The same techniques apply to complex prose and to drama.

✓Read Shakespeare

Spend time reading Shakespeare to become comfortable with the language, the historical period, and the dramatic forms. You may even find yourself making friends with Shakespeare. (Students' responses to exam questions about Shakespeare's plays indicate that, for most of you, these selections are not the most difficult.)

Attend dramatic productions and film presentations whenever possible so that you can appreciate the “body language” of drama when you see it on the written page.

✓What's the idea

Practise formulating your thoughts and perceptions about a work of literature into a “controlling idea” that you can discuss and develop. For exam writing purposes, the controlling idea is the statement that you use as a framework for your written discussion of literature and a given topic. For example, if the topic is the effect of adversity on the human spirit, you might decide to discuss *Hamlet* in terms of this controlling idea: “The individual attempts to prevail in the face of adversity.” Your essay will develop this controlling idea by discussing aspects and details of the play that relate to this idea. Practise focusing your writing on the development of your own “controlling idea” so that you do not lapse into a retelling of the plot of a text.

In any reading that you do, ask yourself what the author's controlling idea is, so that in the reading portion of the exam you are at ease in “getting to the heart” of things.

✓Concentrate

Develop the habit of focusing your thoughts when you are reading, writing, or speaking. Consider it a matter of honour not to lose the train of thought you are following. These skills will improve your efficiency and reliability in exam writing—and anywhere else!

✓Vocabulary

Keep a dictionary nearby and use it. Test yourself before looking up a word—see if you can define it through context clues and your knowledge of prefixes, suffixes, roots, or derivatives. Become a language scholar. As you extend your vocabulary, you extend your capacity to understand and to communicate.

✓Increase your confidence in the last weeks before exam time

A few weeks before writing English 30, review and work through the most recent exams. They are available in your school. You can also purchase your own copies from the Learning Resources Distribution Centre, 12360 - 142 Street, Edmonton T5L 4X9 (Phone: 403-427-5775). The charge is \$2.00 per exam.

You may also want to study the criteria that markers use in scoring the assignments in Part A: Written Response. This information is provided in the **English 30 Information Bulletin Diploma Examinations Program**, which is available in all schools. Review the scoring criteria with your teacher, and aim for a “5.”

How to Do Your Best When Writing the Exam

Simple Things Can Be Important

- Make yourself comfortable. Wear comfortable clothes, eat breakfast, get enough sleep. Give yourself every single advantage you can.
- Pace yourself. Wear a watch and use it. Don’t get lost in one assignment or one selection and discover that you’ve run out of time.
- Use the exam booklet as you wish. If it is your natural working style to underline, highlight, or make notes on what you are reading, do it.
- Make revisions or corrections directly onto your final copy. If you are using a word processor, edit your hard copy with a pen. This is a reminder to markers that word-processed papers are first drafts too, just like their handwritten counterparts.

Writing The Reader’s Response to Literature Assignment, Part A

✓Focus on the topic and the literary selection

To get a clear idea of the topic you are being asked to write about, *first* read both of the assignments in the booklet. *Then*, read the literary selection slowly and carefully, keeping in mind the topic of the assignment. And consider the title: it may offer you an insight into the author’s purpose.

✓Think about your response

Ask yourself these questions:

- What does the selection say to me about the topic?
- What details in the selection create this idea or feeling or impression for me?

Don't panic. The statements about the topic in both assignments provide a point of entry to stimulate and focus your own ideas. There will be something there that will suit your purposes, and it will be within your grasp. Take hold of it and use it to explain your response. Many students have indicated all the ingredients of an excellent response in stray notes and phrases but have not had the will or the confidence to put them together. Don't let that happen to you. Just proceed.

✓ **Maintain a relationship between the assignment and your response**

Choose one or more details from the selection that you can discuss in connection with what you personally have to say about the topic. Your task is to convey **your response to the selection, the topic, and the detail** in the selection. Draw on your personal experience if it suits your purpose effectively, but avoid writing at length about your personal experience and abandoning the selection. In other words, if the selection is about the threatening forces of an uncontrolled and uncontrollable "army," don't write about blueberry pie. Write about your impressions of threatening forces as they are conveyed by the uncontrolled, uncontrollable "army." **The connection between the selection and your response must be evident;** do not leave the marker guessing what it is you are writing about.

Writing the Major Literature Composition Assignment, Part A

✓ **Think about the assigned topic**

The ideas that you explored while you were doing the *Reader's Response to Literature Assignment* will stimulate your insight into the topic as it is presented in the *Major Literature Composition Assignment*. Use these ideas to explore the topic further.

✓ **Choose wisely**

Consider which piece of literature that you have studied best reflects the topic. Choose a selection that you are comfortable with, that is, one that you understand and are familiar with "inside out." Be certain that it relates to the exam topic, and that it is substantial enough to sustain a thorough discussion of the topic at the English 30 level.

✓ **Take time to plan**

Consider how you are going to approach the topic and the literature. Decide what your controlling idea will be. Make this idea clear for the reader (the marker). It is the first indicator of the direction and shape of your essay, your thoughts, intentions, and perceptions, and it serves to introduce you in an otherwise anonymous document. Your controlling idea *must* clearly relate to the topic.

Use your personal style of planning to organize your thoughts about the literature and the topic, as established in your controlling idea. Plan how you will support your statements with detail from the literature you are discussing. Use only those events, circumstances or details that serve to develop your controlling idea.

✓**Become involved with what you have to say**

Establish a relationship with the literature you have chosen to write about, in a way that will reflect the depth of your understanding of the literature and your response to it. Assume your point of view with confidence, and demonstrate its validity. This is your opportunity to provide a sample of your thinking skills, your understanding, and your writing skills.

Writing the Reading Exam (Part B)

✓**Read carefully**

Be sure to read not only each selection, but to read and think about the title, any introductory comments that have been provided, and all the footnotes. If you can, enjoy them.

Read each question carefully. Be sure you understand what is being asked. For example, if a question asks, “What is the irony of John’s humorous comment?” the focus of the question is *irony*, not humour.

✓**Consider your answer**

Read each of the possible answers carefully. If you don’t immediately recognize a correct answer, begin by crossing out the alternatives that you know are wrong.

Pay particular attention to words in the question that are in boldface type. They emphasize that you must make a judgement of degree in choosing an answer.

✓**Don’t be hasty**

If direct quotations are involved, use the line references to go back to the appropriate place in the reading selection. Make sure that you understand the significance of the quotation in its context.

✓**Let the questions help you**

The tone of the **questions** may provide you with helpful information about the tone of the **selection**. If you have difficulty understanding some aspect of the reading selection, be aware of the content and progression of the questions. They are designed to lead you through the selection and to highlight both specific and general characteristics of the content, style, tone, and structure.

✓Review and check

Try to save enough time at the end to go back to questions that you found difficult or were uncertain about. Use all your reading, thinking, and language skills to reconsider the question, its context, and the possible answers.

There are no “trick” questions on the English 30 exams. However, all of the questions are subtle and precise. Don’t rush.

Additional Reminders

✓Further information

For more detailed information about the English 30 diploma examination, ask your teacher about a booklet from Alberta Education called the *English 30 Information Bulletin*. Each English 30 teacher will have a copy.

This bulletin contains a great deal of information about the exam as well as the scoring criteria used by markers to evaluate your written work.

✓Writing your exam on a word processor

If you normally do your written work on a word processor, you may have an opportunity to use a word processor for writing your diploma exam. Speak to your English 30 teacher about this. Every school now has copies of the Interim Policy: *Writing Diploma Examinations with Word Processors*.

✓Samples of Students' Writing

Your teacher will also have a booklet showing samples of students' writing from past English 30 Diploma Examinations. Note that the example responses in the *Samples of Students' Writing* documents have been provided *for instructional purposes only*. If you memorize sections from these responses and use them while writing Part A, teachers who mark your exam will know. You will be guilty of plagiarism and will be in breach of examination regulations.

✓Exam-writing materials

You are responsible for providing your own pen, HB pencil, highlighter, etc. for writing diploma exams.

For PART A: WRITTEN RESPONSE you may use a dictionary (non-electronic, electronic, and/or translation), a thesaurus, and an authorized English language handbook. You must be familiar with the benefits and jeopardies of these materials to use them effectively.

No dictionaries or texts are allowed for writing
PART B: READING.

✓Rescores

You may request a rescore of your examination if you believe that the mark you have received is not appropriate. Before applying for a rescore, be sure to check your *Diploma Examination Results Statement* to see what marks you have been awarded on both parts of the exam. Your PART B mark is not likely to change, but your PART A mark could change slightly. Keep in mind that if you do request a rescore, your new mark, whether it increases or decreases, will be your final mark. There is a \$26.75 fee for this service.

✓Other questions

If you have questions about the exam that your teacher can't answer, or if you are a student without a regular classroom teacher, feel free to call

Ms. Gail Gates, English 30 Examination Manager

or

Ms. Elana Scraba, Assistant Director, Humanities Diploma Exams
at 403-427-0010.

To call toll-free from outside of Edmonton dial 310-0000.

Good Luck!

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